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Shane Larkin never found a niche in the NBA, not for lack of trying. Now he's an MVP and the biggest star in Turkish basketball.

Pull-up. Swish. Up-and-under. Swish. Off-balance jumper. Swish. It was November 2019, a mid-season game against Bayern Munich and **Shane Larkin (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/l/larkish01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, who was playing for Anadolu Efes, could not miss. With three minutes left, he'd

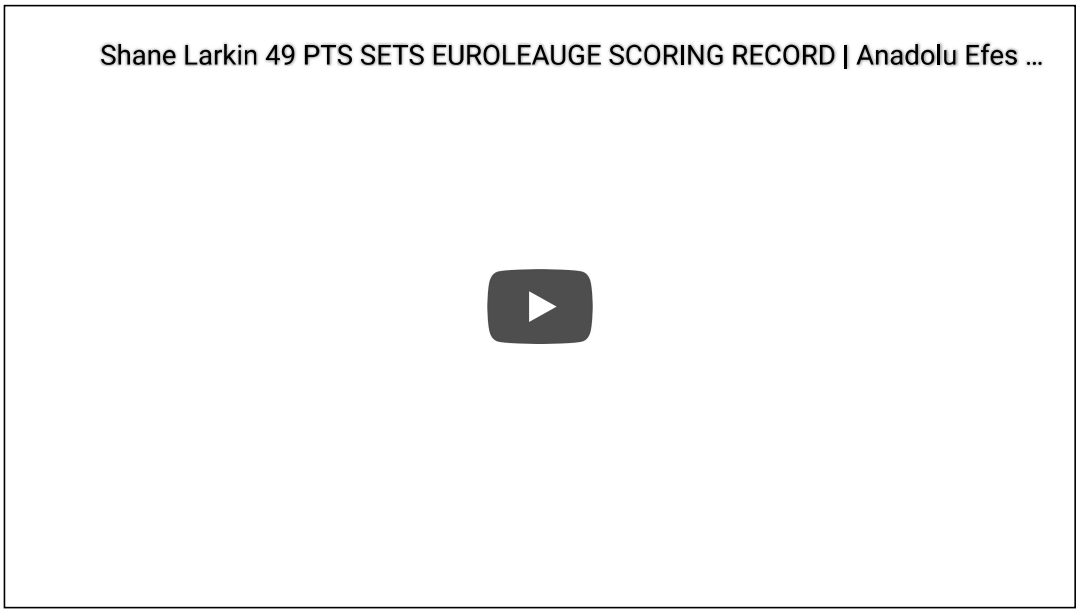
already scored 38 points and his team was ahead 88-66 in the final minutes of an otherwise meaningless mid-season game against a team with a 16-7 record in EuroLeague play.

Meaningless? Not to Shane Larkin. The night before, he had read an article from Eurohoops.net, a well-respected website covering the EuroLeague, that ranked him sixth on the MVP ladder.

Larkin was beside himself. He had won four straight MVPs of the month. And they put me where? Enraged, Larkin channeled the energy into the next game.

But then, with 4:21 remaining, Anadolu Efes coach Ergin Ataman pulled Larkin from the game because Larkin committed an offensive foul and turnover on consecutive possessions. Take me out? Now? Larkin yelled, flailed his arms in question, and pointed to the scoreboard, while Ataman guided him to the bench. 40 points. The Euroleague scoring record? 43 points. The number Larkin wanted — no, needed — to surpass. At around the same time last year, he scored 37 points. He couldn't fall short again. Ataman gave in. Larkin was out for all but one minute and seven seconds, taking a swig of water before checking back into the game.

Pull-up. Swish. Up-and-under. Swish. Off-balance jumper. Swish. In the end, 49 points on 15-of-19 shooting, including 10-of-12 on 3-pointers, and 9-of-10 from the free-throw line.



After the game, Larkin smiled ear-to-ear while high-fiving the fans. But his mind took him elsewhere. He thought about all the haters, the doubters. How they thought he only made it this far because he was the son of Barry Larkin, Hall of Fame baseball player. How they thought he was too small. How they thought he would never make it to the **NBA (https://fansided.com/nba/)**.

Shane Larkin has lived several basketball lives, and finally found a home in Turkey.

"He's a great competitor. And he always competes against something, against someone," Tomislav Mijatovic, Anadolu Efes assistant coach, said in a recent phone interview.

Larkin is the ultimate competitor. Always has been. He averaged 19.6 points in his senior season at Dr. Phillips High School. In matchups against **Austin Rivers (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/r/riverau01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, a year older than Larkin and then the number-one player in the country according to ESPN, in Florida championship matchups, Larkin outscored him both times (though Rivers' deep Winter Park teams did win both games).

He screenshotted and saved on his iPhone all the articles from ESPN, from Orlando Sentinel, from whichever website that doubted him. Too small. Too slow. Barry's son. The smallest perceived slight sticks with Larkin. He remembers going unranked throughout high school. He remembers only receiving offers from mid-major schools until his senior season.

"It wasn't complaining," said Josh Johnnie, who became Larkin's best friend in high school and roomed with him for three years while Larkin played in the NBA and one year overseas. "It was just like a motivational thing. It's always been like that. No one gave him the respect that he wanted or deserved."

(LLUIS GENE/AFP via Getty Images)

Anadolu Efes holds one month of "basic training" before the season — physical preparation, drills, scrimmages — in Spain and Italy, the lands of higher altitudes. During basic training two years ago, in the summer of 2018, Larkin dealt with nagging injuries. Even then, he trained with the team.

"When he did practice and the games he did play in early on in the preseason that he was going to have a special year," **Alec Peters (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/p/peteral01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, Anadolu Efes teammate, and former Suns player, told The Step Back. "He was focused, he was locked in, he was real motivated, and you saw that when he played."

Larkin got off to a rocky start. He was on his second stint in Europe, with the first (2016-17) separating two unsuccessful attempts at sticking in the NBA. Just 25 years old, Larkin was already a basketball nomad looking for a home. In his first 40 games, he averaged under five points on 36.5 percent field goal shooting.

"He didn't seem very happy at that time," said Fatih Basgul, Larkin's assistant. "Off the court, you could see the difference, how it affected him. When you watched him during the games, the way he walked to the gym, the way he walks, you could feel his energy. I was telling people: I wish that he actually leaves because he doesn't seem happy. He wasn't playing his own game."

He mostly came-off-the-bench, working through the nagging injury. He felt like he couldn't perform. Some would quit. Not Larkin. He would stay in the gym along with two other players and bet on shooting drills for money or dinner.

"It wasn't one of those things where I'm injured, the doctor told me to rest, okay I'm going to rest. No. You can always do something. And he did that," said Mijatovic. "For me, and for us on the team, you saw we had a guy there who is willing and able to work on these things and he did. Surprisingly, once that injury was gone, he started slowly picking up the pace. And once he picked it up, it was a point of no return."

In the 41st game against FC Barcelona, all the extra hours, the extra shots paid off. Despite coming off-the-bench, Larkin dropped 37 points on 13-of-15 shooting. Pull-up. Swish. Up-and-under. Swish. Off-balance jumper. Swish.

But Larkin was inconsistent. One game, he would dominate. The next, he would disappear. But he was always visible with his teammates. Even after games in which he played scarcely, he would play cards (Tonk is a team

favorite) and go out to dinner with his teammates after (mostly Zuma Istanbul), where the team would talk about, well, everything.

"He wants to be with his teammates, he wants to hang out and be a part of it all," Peters said. We have a group of guys who are like that. It's one of those things: Sometimes players have a good game, don't have a good game, he's so selfless, he wants to be with his teammates."

Then, the playoffs started. Over the next 14 games, he averaged nearly 18 points per game.

"By the end of the season, he unleashed this monster," Basgul said. He became himself. When they released him, he showed people how much more he has."

The team won the Turkish Super League championship that year but lost in the EuroLeague Final Four, finishing 24-13. In total, Larkin averaged 12.5 points on 49.8 percent shooting in 22.0 minutes.

Larkin took a major leap forward this season. He averaged 22.2 points on 53 percent shooting and 4.1 assists. Most impressive, he drastically improved his 3-point numbers. A career 33.6 percent 3-point shooter in the NBA, Larkin shot 33 percent, 34 percent, and 44.9 percent from deep in his first three seasons overseas. This season, he shot 53.0 percent on 6.9 3-point attempts per game (he had shot no more than 4.5 3-point attempts per game at any stage in his career).

Ever since he broke his ankle before his rookie season, Larkin said, he became more and more uncomfortable shooting 3s when moving to the right, specifically on pull-up jumpers. So, in the NBA, teams started forcing him to his right in the pick-and-roll, where he wasn't comfortable getting his shot off.

A couple of years ago, he started working with a trainer, who forced him to shoot 3s moving to the right, with a strict emphasis on cleaning up his left-right footwork.

"I've worked tremendously over the last few years to get that comfortably," Larkin said. "Now I am a complete threat wherever I am on the court, I could shoot it deep, I could spot-up, I could shoot it short, I go left, right, shoot the 3, left, right go all the way to the basket, so you know, I have just expanded

my overall game to the point where I'm dangerous everywhere, but adding that 3-point shot with my right-hand has opened up so many more opportunities for me and helped take that leap to where I am now."

(Photo by Sonia Canada/Getty Images)

There were plenty of European suitors after him, but Larkin chose Anadolu Efes two years ago because it gave him the "best opportunity to change the culture and 'be Shane Larkin again'."

The year before Larkin joined the team, Anadolu Efes finished last in the Turkish Super League. Larkin wanted to change that. Just like how he declined an offer to team up with the super roster Montverde Academy to continue playing with his hometown public school, Dr. Phillips. Being Shane Larkin means accepting, even thriving with, great responsibility. This is the only way Shane knows.

In a well-documented story, Larkin quit baseball at age six because a little league coach discouraged him from swinging the bat like his former mentors, Pete Rose and Tony Perez. Less documented was the fact that his dad moved him and his family away from Cincinnati, when Larkin was seven years old, so the family didn't have to live under the burgeoning shadow of his MVP status.

This meant, with Barry only visiting their home in Orlando for two months of the year during his baseball career, Shane had to be the man of the house.

"Coming from my father, when he was away, which was a lot, he would always give me small responsibilities around the house," Larkin said. "As an eight or nine-year-old kid, my dad gave me a responsibility, saying if I'm not here: Make sure when everybody goes to sleep, you make sure everybody's door is locked in the house. From a young age, that trained my mind to want to be responsible and be responsible for the action, people, and the things around me."

To this day, he prides himself on shouldering major responsibility — and responding. After he missed the game-winning shot against CSKA Moscow one game, he made the game-winning shot against them the next. After he missed the game-winning against Maccabi Tel-Aviv one game, he scored 40 points in a win the next.

He circles matchups on his calendar. **Mike James (https://www.basketball-reference.com/search/search.fcgi?pid=jamesmi01,jamesmi02&search=Mike+James&utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=** of CSKA Moscow? Supposedly the best point guard in Europe? Circled. **Nikola Mirotic (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/m/mirotni01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** of Barcelona? The guy who left the NBA, who fans expected to take the EuroLeague by storm? Circled. Barcelona? The team he was supposed to sign with before signing with the Celtics? Circled. Baskonia? The team he played one season for? Circled.

"I mean, he's a guy that when the situation rises and it gets more intense, he's gonna rise with it," said Peters. "And you saw that a lot this year. In the big games we played, he was right there, making plays for the team and making plays for himself."

One day after practice, Peters gave Larkin a shooting drill to try. It is called the "M" drill, a one-minute timed shooting drill in which the player must make four shots around on the arc. Larkin took 30 minutes to complete it.

"He came into the locker room, completely pissed off, saying don't ever give me a shooting drill ever again," Peters said. "But he stayed until he got it — like he would not leave until he was able to do it. That speaks to everything

Shane is about: it's either all or nothing."

(Photo by Scott Cunningham/Getty Images)

When Shane Larkin arrived at the University of Miami, no one knew how good he was.

"He wasn't a great drill guy when I got there," Bryan Weber, a graduate assistant for Larkin's freshman and sophomore season at the University of Miami said. "In terms of drills, I was like: he looks good. But he had no hype."

Going into Larkin's freshman season, the Hurricanes were an enigma: a rebuilding program with an old supporting cast. Replacing Frank Haith and his staff were Jim Larranaga, former George Mason head coach, and his staff. Nine of the 15 Hurricanes were upperclassmen. Larkin was one of two freshmen on the team — and he was a transfer, having spent one semester at DePaul University. He felt out of place.

"He was just extremely shy, barely said a word," Erik Swoope, a former teammate of Larkin's at Miami for two years and former Indianapolis Colts tight end said. "He was reserved, a fly on the wall, I barely even noticed him."

Swoope, though, did notice Larkin possessed "a ridiculous amount of power and speed," but there was a key central question: "How do you pull that out?"

Larranaga, University of Miami head coach, had to figure out how to extract Larkin's athletic skills. He is a coach with an educational background who refuses to cuss. But when he saw Larkin losing "Chase the Rabbit," a trapping drill — in which two defenders try to trap an offensive player without a basketball — he stopped the practice and gave Larkin a stern, polite request.

"Shane, please use your god-given talents and run fast," Swoope remembers Larannaga saying.

The next attempt, Larkin blew past Swoope, ending up "two or three arms distance" away.

"Oh, that's why he's here: He's quick as a cat," Swoope thought. "From that moment on, then you would see the burst, the layups, the steals. Before you knew it, it was Shane Larkin for the world to see."

But Larkin mostly struggled throughout his freshman year. He showed flashes. Some games, he would dominate. Other games, he would disappear. Going into his sophomore season, the team needed Larkin to perform, or as Swoope said: "It was like, Shane: unleash yourself."

Larkin had a fine freshman season — he ended up starting half the season — but it wasn't noteworthy enough to warrant hype from analysts. He failed to make the **Bob Cousy (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/c/cousybo01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** watchlist, a pre-season award that names the top 50 point guards. He wanted to prove the haters, the doubters wrong.

But at first, he pushed too hard. Just like his freshman season, he struggled. And as Larkin struggled, so too did the Hurricanes. In their first exhibition game, they lost to Florida Southern, a Division-II school. In the regular season, they got dunked off the court by Florida Gulf-Coast (pre-Sweet-16 run), scolded by Arizona, and lost on a buzzer-beater to Indiana State.

The Hurricanes were a tight-knit group. During the summer from Shane's freshman to sophomore year, they all stayed in Miami, working out every day for 12 weeks. After training sessions, the Hurricanes would frequent

Chipotle, where teammates would encourage him.

"I think he was kind of letting us lead the way. With us being the leaders on the team, he always respected that. But initially, it was like: Imma play off of you guys. But once he really saw that we were like it doesn't matter who scores or does what, we want you to be who you are, to be confident in the player you are," said teammate Julian Gamble.

During the summer from his freshman to sophomore season, Larkin admitted to being "immature," and he had a "lot of growing up to do in a little amount of time." He rushed to a few practices and team events. He roomed with **Durand Scott (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/s/scottdu01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, whose laid-back personality was similar to Larkin's. Seeing this, Larannaga switched Gamble to his roommate. The sixth-year senior became his mentor, waking him up and feeding him advice. Larranaga also shaped the offense around Larkin, exchanging a pound-it-in-the-paint offense for a pick-and-roll heavy one.

From there, Larkin started putting the pieces together. Started being himself. Pull-up. Swish. Up-and-under. Swish. Off-balance jumper. Swish. Miami could not lose.

"We won our first 13 ACC games and to me, he was the best player in the league," Weber said. "Throughout the ACC season is when he came out of his shell. He was unbelievable."

LeBron James (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/jamesle01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-), Dwayne Wade, and other members of the Heat showed up for a game against North Carolina. Miami defeated the Tar Heels by 25 and upset Duke when the Blue Devils were ranked first in the country. Larkin emerged from his cocoon; **he and Durand Scott donned yellow highlighter shoes during games when such a style was "so mid-2000s." (https://twitter.com/durand_scott/status/502186752615133185)**Larkin won the coaches' vote for ACC player of the year, leading the Hurricanes to the best record in the ACC and an ACC championship win. The Hurricanes were slotted as a two-seed in the NCAA tournament. Larkin was having a blast.

They won their first two games, reaching the Sweet 16. The night before their matchup against Marquette in the Sweet 16, Larkin and some other teammates contracted food poisoning from a team dinner. Larkin stayed up until 6 a.m., throwing up in his hotel room's bathtub.

He powered through it — scoring 14 points on 4-of-8 shooting — but his efforts proved futile. Larkin was devastated. He thought they would have won the championship.

The night of the loss, back at the hotel, the team ate dinner. Afterward, coach Larannaga pulled Larkin into his office and asked him what he was going to do? *What am I going to do?* He didn't know yet. Didn't even think about it.

Enlightened, he entered his name into the pre-draft survey, where scouts estimate a player's likely draft position. The results? Late first round to mid-second round. Late first round to mid-second round? For the small point guard who had no NBA draft hype before the season? Quickly, he hired an agent, who started calling teams. A team in the late first-round didn't promise to draft him but gave him a strong indication it would.

After talking to his family, friends, and teammates, he knew he had to strike while the iron was hot, knew he had to shoot for his dream.

"The fact that he could go into our big games playing against McDonald's All-Americans and he's not only running circles against them, but he's stealing the ball, making crazy plays, throwing off the backboard, there's a rare amount of guys under 6-feet that succeed in the NBA," Swoope said. "But, I remember when he did his NBA combine, I think his three-step vertical was 45 inches, and I think that alone, on top of the many things that he blessed the world with, I was like: That's gonna be the equalizer to get him over the top. When it came to the draft, I figured there was no doubt. He's gonna go to the NBA and he's gonna have great success."

(Photo by Ronald Martinez/Getty Images)

Larkin was drafted with the No. 18 pick in the 2013 NBA draft. The Atlanta Hawks drafted him but immediately traded him to the Dallas Mavericks. In preparation for the summer league and preseason play, the Mavericks roster and coaching staff practiced at Austin Commercial, the practice facility in Austin, Texas.

One day before summer league, on the sixth day of practice, Larkin wanted to impress. He saw Mark Cuban, Mavericks owner, waltz into the building. Larkin had never seen Cuban in person before. On TV, he had seen him seated behind the Mavericks bench during games, screaming a string of expletives, but here, Cuban was quiet, observant. In Larkin's mind, he was taking mental notes.

"Now, I've gotta show off, I've gotta go crazy, I gotta show him why he just drafted me with the 18th pick, the kid who didn't start the season on any draft boards," Larkin said.

One play, he saved the ball from trickling out-of-bounds. He saw one big man on the other side of the court. He went up for a two-handed dunk, then POP!

His right ankle bent inward. Larkin tried to walk it off. But the doctors told him it was broken.

He was out until the start of the regular season. Even when he became healthy 10 games into the season, veterans **Devin Harris (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/h/harride01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, **Jose Calderon (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/c/caldejo01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** were above him in the rotation. He struggled that year, averaging 2.2 points in about 10 minutes per game.

But, still only 20 years old, he was eager to prove himself in the league. After the season ended — Dallas lost in the first round to San Antonio in seven games — he flew to Miami for a week, then back to Dallas. For two months, he practiced every day with **Rick Carlisle (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/c/carliri01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, the Mavericks head coach, and the Mavericks trainer. Then, he flew back to Miami.

A few days later, shopping in a Miami mall with two of his friends, he saw his name trending on Twitter. He called his agent. He didn't think it was going to go through. Larkin hung up on his agent. He called Johnnie, who was shopping in another store, and who ran over to Larkin.

"You lying!" Johnnie said.

"Nope, I guess I'm headed to New York," Larkin said.

(Photo by Gregory Shamus/Getty Images)

After every home game with the New York Knicks, Larkin would come home to his apartment in White Plains, a suburb outside of Manhattan, and vent.

The Knicks ran a triangle offense — a stagnant offensive system in which five players patrol five spots. In this offense, point guards tend to pass the ball to the wing and cut to the corner. Larkin hated it.

"I want to go back to the days in Orlando, balling, I haven't shown the league yet I can do what I can do," Johnnie, who roomed with him in an apartment in White Plains, remembers Larkin saying.

In Larkin's three years on Dr. Phillips High School's varsity team, the Panthers ran a "motion offense" with a strong emphasis on transition play. But mostly, the offense was simple: give Shane Larkin the ball and get out of the way. It was a high-ball screen or isolation for Larkin.

"We did everything around Shane, he brought the ball up the floor every time," said Anthony Long, Shane's high school coach. "He had more offensive responsibility in that time period — and he delivered."

During his senior year, Larkin averaged 18.8 points, 6.4 rebounds, and 6.3 assists. But statistics only tell a fraction of the story. Teammates recall training with Shane and Barry in the Larkin's backyard. These were explosive-based workouts, mostly without a basketball: Weight-balls, resistance bands, box jumps shaped by a hall-of-fame shortstop. Prior to every game, Larkin never failed to ask Coach Long to defend the opponent's best player.

"He's always wanted to show people that 'I've arrived, that I could play with the top players,'" said Damani Cade, a teammate of Larkin's for two years at Dr. Phillips High School. "Even in practice, if we were to run sprints, shoot jump-shots, whatever we're doing, he's first. He's not gonna let you beat him. I don't know if I've ever seen Shane Larkin not win a sprint."

New York was a far cry from Orlando. New York finished 17-65. Given more opportunity than in Dallas, Larkin capitalized, averaging 6.2 points on 43.3 percent shooting and 3.0 assists in 22 minutes per game. He also underwent an "eye-opening experience playing in the Big Apple."

But the Knicks declined to extend his rookie extension, making him a free agent for the first time in his career.

(Photo by Jason Miller/Getty Images)

Feeling sick to his stomach, Shane Larkin rushed to the bathroom, swung open the toilet seat, and vomited. He was in Los Angeles in a hotel with two of his best friends in the summer of 2016.

He played on the Brooklyn Nets the season before but wasn't expecting to return, although he wasn't opposed to it, either. The Nets, still recovering from failing to build the **Kevin Garnett (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/g/garneke01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, **Paul Pierce (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/p/piercpa01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, **Joe Johnson (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/johnsjo02.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** "superteam," scraped together a heap of free agents on one-year contracts, fired coach **Lionel Hollins (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/h/hollili01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** 20 games into the season, then fired GM Billy King 40 games into the season.

Even with all that turnover and uncertainty, he had a fine season, averaging 7.3 points on 44.1 percent shooting and 4.4 assists in 22 minutes per game. He believed it warranted a contract offer, especially in the summer of 2016, when the free agency salary cap skyrocketed to record-high levels. He expected to be getting a call in the first, maybe the second week of free agency.

Then…c*rickets…*

Meanwhile…

Matthew Dellevadova, four years, $40 million with the Milwaukee Bucks…

D.J. Augustin, three years, $29 million with the Orlando Magic…

Ish Smith (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/s/smithis01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-), three years, $18 million to the Detroit Pistons…

The dagger? **Jeremy Lin (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/l/linje01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, three years, $36 million with the Nets.

He saw all the overpriced contracts on his phone. Then, he threw up in the toilet.

"He got so wound up, he got sick," said Smith. "I was confused, too. There were so many opportunities and none came for Shane."

Sure, non-guaranteed contract offers were on the table. But he was 23, and he'd certainly be back in the same vicious cycle the next year. The message was clear: The NBA didn't want him. Not that much — not enough — at least. It was sadly official: Shane Larkin did not love basketball anymore.

"I could have done that whole route and tried to hang on to the NBA, but I needed a change of scenery, to find myself again because I had lost myself completely," he said.

(Photo by Srdjan Stevanovic/Getty Images)

Larkin signed with Baskonia, a Spanish team, in 2016. When he checked into his hotel in Victoria, he walked up to the concierge.

"Hi, my name is Shane Larkin," he said, expecting him to recognize the name.

"Que?"

In Victoria, Larkin, who only speaks English, experienced a culture shock. He realized there was nothing to do except play basketball (and play video games; Call of Duty and Apex Legends are his favorites). Learning to love the game again was his only option.

But first, he had to go back to becoming himself, the bouncy sniper equipped with the ultimate green light. Three years of inconsistent playing time had stunted his confidence.

In his first practice with Baskonia, Larkin didn't shoot. He deferred to his teammates, hid in the corners, and dribbled the ball cautiously. Like in the NBA. Cautious. Too cautious.

After the practice, Sito Alonso, Baskonia's head coach at the time, pulled Larkin into his office. Alonso set up chairs for himself and Larkin, both facing his laptop. Alonso hit the keypad. The computer showed Larkin at the

University of Miami. Making shots. Missing shots. Racking up assists. Tossing turnovers. The point was, he was being himself. Alonso looked into Larkin's eyes.

"You are Shane Larkin," the coach said. "That's who you are. Be Shane Larkin."

It paid off. He started getting his swagger back. In 63 games in Liga ACB and the Euroleague, Larkin averaged 14 points per game on higher than 40 percent shooting, helping Baskonia to a 40-25 overall finish. Now, he thinks he played "pretty well" — he averaged 13.5 points on 41.4 percent shooting and 5.3 assists in 63 total games — but he knows it also meant more than that, meant more to his confidence.

"That coach really helped me get my mind to where I needed it to have success moving forward," Larkin said. "He brought back that fire, that competitiveness that made me, me."

Larkin became a free agent after the 2016 season. He signed with Barcelona, a notch up the Euroleague ladder. He had four days until the deal became official. At that time, in the summer of 2017, he was training in Miami. On the next court was Jay Larannaga, Boston Celtics assistant coach and son of Jim Larannaga, training **Marcus Smart (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/s/smartma01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** and **Terry Rozier (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/r/roziete01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, Boston's backup point guards.

One morning, their workouts ended at the same time. Larranaga walked over to ask what Larkin's plans were. That afternoon, Larkin's phone buzzed. It was his agent.

"Hey, **Danny Ainge (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/a/aingeda01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** just called."

"About what?" Larkin said.

With **Isaiah Thomas (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/t/thomais02.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, suffering from what seemed to be a career-threatening hip injury, the **Celtics (https://fansided.com/nba/nba-teams/boston-celtics/)**, needed a spark plug off the bench who could play 18-25 minutes per night. Larkin signed with Boston. Though he would earn significantly less money than he would with Barcelona, there was the opportunity to play big minutes on a playoff team. One week later, Larkin, sitting at a favorite sushi spot in Miami, looked down at his phone and saw a Woj bomb.

"Cleveland and Boston have moved into serious talks on a trade centered on All-Star guard **Kyrie Irving (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/i/irvinky01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, league sources tell ESPN."

He turned to his friend, Johnnie, and threw his phone at him.

"Here we go again, bro," Larkin said.

Larkin appeared in 43 games, averaging 4.3 points in 14.4 minutes.

He injured his shoulder in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals and didn't play in Game 7. Boston lost, and Larkin's NBA career was effectively over. Brad Stevens gave him an exit meeting. Then…nothing. Boston never called. Before the finals were even over, the news was announced: Boston signed **Brad Wanamaker (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/w/wanambr01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, also a point guard.

Now, if an NBA team is interested in him, it must guarantee him 18 to 25 minutes, a chance to shoulder "true responsibility" right away and designate him an "important piece of a franchise moving forward." At the same time, he admits, "most players don't make that jump from EuroLeague to being a starting point guard in the NBA."

"I will not go back to the NBA as a third point guard," Larkin said. "So, if any team asks about that, we're not even gonna answer the phone."

(Photo by Rob Carr/Getty Images)

When he was with the Mavericks, before a game, Shane Larkin walked off the team bus and into the arena. He stood in front of **Dirk Nowitzki (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/n/nowitdi01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**. But Fans crowded Dirk, chanted his name, and asked for autographs. Meanwhile, Shane went unrecognized.

"Me, myself, if I was one of those people in the crowd, would I want the rookie guy or the picture with the world phenomenon, super celebrity, superstar Dirk Nowitzki? I would probably choose to have the picture with Dirk, too. It's not a disrespectful thing, it's just what it is," Larkin said.

Now, in his second year with Anadolu Efes, Shane Larkin is the star of Turkey. His face is plastered to billboards on highways. The Euroleague website created a documentary called "InShane." He is recognized everywhere he goes. One time in the airport, the team was hurrying to a flight. But not Larkin. He stopped. Fans were shouting his name. A family shouted: "Larkin! Larkin! MVP! MVP!" Happily, he signed their T-shirts.

"One time we're in a mall, going to a movie, and this kid and his family, and 10 minutes later, and this kid came back running, bought a jersey, found us, and got his new jersey signed," Basgul said. "Another time, Shane beat

Fenerbahce in the Euroleague final four, and we're at Starbucks, in the asian side of Istanbul, where a majority of Fenerbahce fans are and this guy stood up and was like: Larkin, I hate you! Then, there was a one-second pause. But I respect you, I love you, can we take a picture. Shane said, 'yeah, sure.'"

Every star has a signature move. LeBron is known for the silencer, Steph Curry for the shimmy, **Michael Jordan (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/jordami01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)** for the shrug, Shane Larkin has become known for holding up a three-finger rock-star sign. He even uses an emoji for it on social media:

"I would rather have people love me as the player and as the person, as opposed to just being one of the other guys," Larkin said. "My celebrity, the way I am perceived over there, I am the big player over there, I am the top dog in Europe at the moment. And that lifestyle is way more exciting, fun, gratifying than being one of the other guys in the NBA."

Why?

"If I'm working that hard to try to get you guys to believe that I'm the best player in Europe, and people are understanding that, I want to enjoy the luxuries of that. I work hard for what I do and I want people to respect that. I don't want to go to the gym and work out and put my body through hell, and then when it's the most fun time, and everybody gets to see what you've been working on, and it's time to put on a show, you're in a warmup the entire time, sitting on the bench, you don't get to enjoy the pleasures of your work. I love putting in the work and then I love the benefits of my hard work."

Larkin is currently a free agent. Before the coronavirus pandemic, he and Anadolu Efes were negotiating a new contract. He signed a two-year deal worth $7.7 million with Efes in late April 2020, a contract he is trying to restructure. He wants to make it clear he is "100,000 percent fine" staying in Turkey and is willing to stay for the remainder of his career.

For Larkin, the true feeling of comfort, of happiness, lies in belonging, in feeling wanted.

(Photo by Sonia Canada/Getty Images)

Standing on a teal stage across from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Shane Larkin put his hand across his mouth. A fan held his Anadolu Efes jersey with Larkin's signature imprinted on it.

Larkin whispered to himself: What the hell? This is crazy.

About a month earlier, on Dec. 15, on a weekly TV show in which Erdogan normally talks about politics, a reporter asked him about Shane Larkin.

"We will do what we need to do about it," the Turkish president said. "We would like to see such a successful basketball player in our national team. Larkin can take our national team to very good results."

To improve its Olympic success, Turkey once convinced **Scottie Wilbekin (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/w/wilbesc01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, former Florida point guard, and Bobby Dixon, former Maryland point guard, to adopt Turkish citizenship. Larkin was also interested. A day after Erdogan's statement, Larkin **tweeted a two-sentence statement, in which he thanked the president. (https://twitter.com/ShaneLarkin_3/status/1206584039554994177)**

Behind the scenes, a Turkish soccer federation representative attended an Anadolu Efes practice, after which he presented Larkin with a Turkish soccer national team jersey: Larkin, number zero. Larkin gave him his jersey as well. Larkin posted a picture on Twitter. Rumors swirled. Turkish fans wanted Larkin to join their team.

Larkin and his assistant attended multiple meetings with **Hedo Turkoglu (https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/t/turkohe01.html?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-)**, former Magic star and current chief adviser to the president of Turkey. On Feb. 1, Shane Larkin became a Turkish citizen.

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On Feb. 8, he received his jersey. After "Shane Larkin!" was announced, the supposedly too-small, never-gonna-make-it Larkin began his ceremonious walk across the stage. He met with Erdogan in the middle of the stage. They shook hands. Erdogan moved his hand up to his forehead over Larkin's forehead and laughed: He was taller than Larkin.

Erdogan and Larkin held up an autographed Efes jersey. Turkoglu handed Larkin his new Turkey jersey: Larkin, number zero. Standing below the stage, one thousand fans ran to the front shouting "Larkin! Larkin! Larkin!," whipped out their phones, and snapped selfies with the star. Their star.

NEXT: De'Aaron Fox and the Kings will bring chaos to Orlando (https://fansided.com/2020/06/09/de-aaron-fox-sacramento-kings/)

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